

THE ROLE OF PROPHET OF ISLAM
MUHAMMAD'S (P.B.U.H.) STRATEGY OF
DIALOGUE IN CONFLICT MANAGEMENT AND
PEACE BUILDING IN THE NEW MILLENNIUM

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Introduction

Conflict is an unavoidable characteristic of individual life as well as an inevitable phenomenon of international system. In contrast, peace is a condition desirable not only for the life of a human being but in the world affairs that can only be achieved by exclusion of conflict. So, it is a focal point of discussion for social, political and international scholars in particular. Different schools of thought have tried to develop devices to avoid the collision and maintain peace by dispute resolution, because Islam guides its followers in every sphere of life through Quran (the Holy Book of Muslims) and Sunnah (the actions of Prophet Muhammad). Hence conflict and peace are also addressed in Islam and some guiding rules and methods are given in the Holy Book (Quran) and Hadith (statements of the Holy Prophet Muhammad). The Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H) acted upon these rules, set many examples and developed devices to resolve disputes by peaceful methods.

Methodology

This study is qualitative in nature. Therefore qualitative research methods are used for the collection of data along

with the combination of descriptive, analytical and historical models. The study is based on a secondary source of data. Counter-arguments have been studied and helped to build an objective approach to the problem and to draw conclusions for the purpose of the study. The study is limited to the conflict management strategy of the dialogue of the Prophet of Islam Muhammad (P.B.U.H) and a few incidents have been only taken from his life for analysis.

Peace, conflict and conflict management

From the beginning of human history until the contemporary modern world, peace has remained one of the basic requirements and goals of human beings¹. According to Webster's dictionary², peace has the following characteristics:

- Condition of harmony or calm;
- Absence of social disorder;
- Condition of security;
- Maintenance of order through law or convention within a society;
- Abolition of war;
- State of compromise after conflict or hostility.

According to John Galtung, peace means nonexistence of planned collective violence and collection of ethics of international community of nations³. The word 'conflict' is derived from the Latin word *confligere* which means to hit collectively⁴.

According to Wall and Callister (1995)⁵, a conflict arises when a party thinks that its interests are being damaged by another party, i.e. when interests of two parties clash and they cannot enjoy advantages at the same time⁶.

It is obvious that a conflict is unavoidable because everyone has a different set of beliefs, standards and

code of conduct, which directs its dealings and inspiration⁷. Some writers highlight three conditions that can create conflict. Firstly, conflict emerges when the parties concerned cannot reach agreement. Secondly, if interdependence exists among parties that built reciprocal pressure over each other. Thirdly, a shortage of resources leads to conflict⁸.

Some scholars take an optimistic view of conflict. In their opinion, it can play a role in individual progress and development of society. We can learn from diversities and opposite opinions. It can generate new dimensions of thinking and prepare us to handle these differences in a way that may lead us towards progress and advantage⁹. A Conflict Management Strategy means the use of formal techniques of dialogue or negotiation, adjudication or mediation in order to settle a dispute or conflict by those involved in it or by a third party¹⁰. These techniques are also called conflict resolution methods or strategies¹¹.

Some scholars describe five types of strategies to resolve a conflict, such as avoiding, accommodating, forcing, collaborating, and compromising.

Generally, there are three phases to resolve a conflict, namely avoidance, decreasing the severity of conflict and resolution¹².

Because the nature of conflict does not remain the same in different eras and situations, various methods, techniques or strategies of its resolution are used depending on its nature and time. Conflict can be basically resolved in two ways, using either violent or peaceful methods¹³. Thus, there are many types and varieties of conflict resolution or management strategies. Peaceful methods, like negotiation, dialogue, arbitration, mediation and adjudication are, however, desirable strategies for maintaining durable peace in the world.

*Prophet of Islam Muhammad's (P.B.U.H)
strategy of Conflict Management*

Islam gives a complete code of life, thus it introduced its own conduct and principles of life that can be traced from two sources: Quran (the Holy Book) and Suunah (actions of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him)). Similarly as with the issue of conflict and peace, many guiding principles are given in Quran and Sunnah (actions of the Prophet of Islam Muhammad (P.B.U.H) on the burning issues of cotemporary world. The Prophet of Islam Muhammad (P.B.U.H) set a number of traditions for peaceful resolution of conflict. The strategies adopted by him to settle disputes and conflict were so scientific and effective that they can be used to maintain peace and prepare the world to face the challenges, even in the modern world.

Hiful Fudul

The Hiful Fudul was perhaps the first attempt of Muhammad (the prophet of Islam) to resolve the conflict by peaceful means¹⁴.

Near Mecca there is a place known as Ukaz where an annual fair was held during themonth of Dhul-Qa'dah when bloodshed and fighting were prohibited. Once awar broke out between the tribes of Quraysh, Banu Kinanah and the Qais 'Aylan. This bloody war continued for ten years (580 to 590 AD)¹⁵. Many precious lives were lost during the war; uncertainty and insecurity prevailed in society. These circumstances forced peace loving people to take some action. Therefore, a committee for peace called Hiful Fuzul was formed and an oath for peace was taken among the conflicting tribes. The Prophet of Islam Muhammad (P.B.U.H) participated actively in this peace agreement. Muhammad (P.B.U.H) always felt proud that

he had been present at the house of Ibn Zadan at the time of agreement¹⁶. He further said that he would rather participate in this type of peace agreement than accept an offer of a precious gift of red camels¹⁷.

No doubt this oath played a remarkable role in maintaining peace and put a stop to bloody wars in the Arab world. Thus, one can say that through Hiful Fudul a third party alliance was established and acted as a mediator between the conflicting Arab tribes.

Incident of Erection of Hajar al-Aswad

Even before he was bestowed with prophet-hood, Muhammad (P.B.U.H) had displayed the quality of a good arbitrator while settling the dispute that had arisen on the issue of erection of the holy Black Stone (Hajar al-Aswad). He resolved the bloody conflict at the age of 35. The problem emerged on the reconstruction of Kaba. When rebuilding of Kaba became necessary due to flooding, the construction works were equally divided between Arab tribes¹⁸. However, at the time of erection of the Black Stone (Hajar al-Aswad), a disagreement emerged because every chief of tribe wanted to enjoy the honour of erection of the holy Stone in its place. When the issue became so serious that chances of bloody clash increased and no tribe was ready to sacrifice for peace, and their attitudes became more violent instead, 'Banu Abdud Dar' brought a bowl of blood and 'Banu Adi', 'Banu Kaa'b' and 'Banu Lua'y' took an oath to fight till death for this respect and soaked their hands in the blood. The situation became so serious that the construction work was suspended for a few days. At last a decision was made, based on the advice of Abu Umayyah ibn Mugirah, that the very first one to pass through the gate of al-Suffah would be their arbitrator to resolve the issue¹⁹. Muhammad (P.B.U.H) was the first man to enter through the gate. Seeing him,

the people at once accepted him as their arbitrator without any hesitation. Muhammad (P.B.U.H) examined the situation and sensitivity of the issue. He took a sheet, tied a piece of rope at the edge of the sheet, placed the holy Black Stone in the middle of it and said to representatives of every tribe to hold the rope and take it to its place. Finally, Muhammad (P.B.U.H) erected the Hajar al-Aswad (holy Stone) at its place. This incident is also a great example of good arbitration of Muhammad (P.B.U.H) showing how he saved the antagonistic Arab tribes from a violent clash. He decided the issue in a manner free from tribal prejudice as he did not decide in favour of his tribe Quraysh, which might give rise to the feeling of anger among the Quraysh and lead to a clash²⁰.

In this way he solved the problem rationally and considered common interest of peace for all Arabs as compared to tribal interests. His technique of arbitration can be used to effectively settle disputes even in the modern era.

The Incident of Social and Economic Boycott

When Muhammad (P.B.U.H) reached the age of 40, he declared himself to be the last Prophet of Allah (God) and started preaching the new religion, Islam, in Mecca. One of the pillars of Islam is based on the concept of Tawheed (oneness of God). The monotheistic essence of Islam was totally against the belief of people of Mecca who were idolaters and used to worship hundreds of idols.

Moreover, acceptance of Islam was also a threat to their power and authority. Initially, the preaching was done in secret, however, after some time, the prophet of Islam (P.B.U.H) openly undertook his first effort to convert the Meccans into Muslims. Thus, they turned against the Prophet of Islam Muhammad (P.B.U.H) and his followers and used all their efforts to stop his preaching. With the passage of time, their enmity increased. For example,

they physically tortured Muslims and started propaganda against Muhammad (P.B.U.H) saying that he is a conjurer, intellectually disabled and a poet and warned his uncle not to help him. When this brought no results, the chiefs of Mecca offered him (P.B.U.H) wealth, power or to provide him with a beautiful woman.

When all their efforts failed, the chiefs of Quraysh signed an agreement to boycott Muhammad (P.B.U.H), his companions and the clans of Banu Hashim and Banu Mutalib because of their support for Muhammad (P.B.U.H) and a copy of the agreement was hung at the entrance of the Kaaba (the Holy Place). Except for Abu Lahab's family, who decided to support the tribes of Quraysh, the clans of Banu Hashim and Banu Muttalib, whether they were Muslims or not, were forced to take refuge in a narrow valley which came to be known as 'Shi`b Abu Talib (the valley of Abu Talib). The social and economic sanctions imposed were so strict that dealings of all type were stopped with the above mentioned clans and they were even forced to eat leaves²¹ until they hand over Muhammad (P.B.U.H) or stop providing support to him²². This boycott was implemented for three years (616–619). After three years, the document of the agreement was damaged by termites. Because of efforts taken by some kind-hearted persons, particularly Hisham ibn Amr, Zuhair, Hakim ibn Khuwailid, the sanctions were lifted and the suffering clans returned to Mecca.

This incident not only reflects a direct confrontation between opposite parties, it is also an example of tolerance, patience and peace loving attitude of the Prophet of Islam (P.B.U.H). It clearly results from analysis of the earlier history of Arabs that a civil war was inevitable in this case. Given that those tribes used to engage in fights over such minor issues as a horse, and the fights continued for many years, the question arises how it was possible that they suffered all that hardship for three

years without any resistance²³. Actually, this was possible because of the policy of Muhammad (P.B.U.H) to avoid clashes and settle problems without any bloodshed.

End of Enmity between Aws and Khazaraj

At the time when the Prophet of Islam Muhammad (Peace be Upon Him) arrived in Medina, its population was basically divided into three large groups, namely Jews, Aws and Khazaraj . The two tribes had a long history of hostility. Before the Hijrah (movement from one place to another for the sake of belief) of Muhammad (P.B.U.H), they fought many battles. They even fought a bloody war just before the arrival of Muhammad (P.B.U.H) in Medina²⁴. Meanwhile some people of Medina visited Mecca to perform the pilgrimage. They were influenced by the teaching of Muhammad (P.B.U.H). After that more people came to Mecca and met²⁵ him, embraced Islam and accepted Muhammad (P.B.U.H) as their leader, both political as well as spiritual, taking the oath of al-Aqaba. They assured him that in case of his migration to Medina, people of Medina would not only support but also protect him. Thus, when he migrated to Medina all groups, including also the conflicting parties al-Aws and al-Khazaraj, accepted him as their leader and Muhammad (P.B.U.H) ended their conflict by creating a sense of brotherhood. In this way he succeeded in maintaining peace among them by mediation on the basis of the concept of brotherhood.

Medina charter

The Charter of Medina is the best example that peace can be achieved through peaceful methods instead of war or bloody clash with a secret agenda. It also reflects the belief of the Prophet of Islam Muhammad (P.B.U.H) in

the promotion of peace. Analysis of this agreement shows how the policy of coexistence can be helpful in achieving peace and that even the contemporary world can enjoy benefits of this method to remove the misperception and misunderstanding among followers of different religions, i.e. Muslims, Christians and Jews, which is necessary for world peace.

When the Prophet of Islam Muhammad (P.B.U.H) migrated from Mecca to Medina, it consisted of many different tribes, mainly Arab and Jewish ones. These tribes had a long history of enmity²⁶. Absence of central government and governance conflicts were resolved through power that often added fuel to the fire and widened the gap between the tribes instead of promoting peace, where the Prophet of Islam called for peace. Haykal (1976) comments that it was a great political success of Muhammad (P.B.U.H) to unite the city of Yathrib.

Muslims and Jews both established an alliance and cooperation under the political structure established by the Prophet of Islam Muhammad (P.B.U.H) (179). This agreement not only maintained peace in Medina, but also guaranteed peace in the future. Since Jews constituted the majority in Medina and could thus create any unrest, in order to avoid clashes between Jews and Muslims, it was necessary to satisfy the Jews. Under this agreement, Muslims and Jews had equal rights. Good diplomatic strategy of Muhammad (P.B.U.H) forced Jews to unite with Muslims under authority of the Prophet of Islam (P.B.U.H) and create long-lasting peace.

The Medina Charter can be summarized in the following points²⁷: Muslims and Jews should live as one community.

1. Each group should maintain its own faith and will not interfere with another.
2. In case of clashes with a third party, each should lend a helping hand to the other.

3. In case of an attack on Medina, both parties will jointly defend the city.
4. Peace should be maintained after discussion with each other.
5. Medina should be considered the Holy city by both, so, any bloodshed therein should be prohibited.
6. The Prophet of Islam will decide all types of disputes and he should be considered the final court of appeal.

Analysis of some sections or clauses of the Charter show that through this agreement Muhammad (P.B.U.H) succeeded in uniting all groups of Medina under a single state. According to point one of the above mentioned Charter, Jews and Muslims formed a single community²⁸, irrespective of their culture, religion or language. It is the best example of unifying within one community diverse groups having a different philosophy. In today's global world this point is more relevant for uniting the people throughout the world into an international community.

Point two, on the other hand, depicts tolerance towards other religions and respect for faith²⁹.

This point replicates the verse of Quran (2:256)³⁰ which says, "There is no compulsion in religion". The Prophet of Islam did not declare Islam necessary for unity and formation of community and did not disapprove of other ways of living, instead all residents of Medina were gathered under a single constitution (the Charter of Medina) based on moral principles and ethical living. The above mentioned clause has potential to resolve such issues as extremism and impatient attitudes towards other religions, posing a significant threat to peace in the modern world.

This Charter is very relevant in the post-9/11 era, in which enmity and fear have arisen at the global level and terrorist and extremist activity is being confused with Islam teachings, which is totally wrong. The peace strategy

of Muhammad (P.B.U.H) can help us to understand how diverse believes can be managed throughout the world³¹ and how Islam entertains the diverse believes³².

In the global world, where the nations and people are more linked to one another as at other times in history, understanding other religions is the prerequisite for achieving world peace. In this context, the Medina Charter can play a significant role and can help us learn how to establish a pluralistic state through establishment of a single community. The Medina Charter was a blend of basic teachings of all religions, such as peace, love, liberty, patience and compromise.

The Peace Treaty of Hdaybiyya

It was an old tradition of Arabs that everyone was free to visit the Kaaba unarmed and any type of fighting was forbidden during the four sacred months of the year. One of these months was Zilqa'ada. Thus, after six years of migration, the Prophet of Islam decided to visit Mecca with 1,400 of his followers to perform Umra (Lesser Pilgrimage). He took animals for sacrifice and ordered every person to have only one sword for self-defense³³.

He intentionally chose the Holy month as he had no intention to clash with the people of Mecca. When the news of his departure reached Meccans, they became furious and decided to stop Muslims from entering Mecca. The enemies of Islam swore that they would not let that happen at any cost³⁴.

They prepared an expedition. An army under the leadership of Khlid bin Walid and Ikrama ibn Abu Jahil headed towards the route to Medina³⁵.

When Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H) was informed about the violent reaction of Meccans, Muslims changed the route in order to avoid the clash with the Meccan army. Muslims were not frightened, they wanted to prevent the

bloodshed and maintenance. They continued their journey. When they reached a place called Hudaibiyya in the north of Mecca, Muhammad (P.B.U.H) ordered to set up camp there and sent a messenger to inform the Tribes of Mecca that they had come there with a holy purpose only and were not interested in war. He would only perform Umera with his followers and return after sacrificing the animals, but the people of Mecca did not agree and said they would not allow Muslims to enter Mecca. Having received messages from the Holy Prophet Muhammad, the Quraysh formed a team that consisted of Budail Ibn Waraqa, Husail and Urwa Ibn Masud whose task was to examine the situation. Muhammad (P.B.U.H) sent Usman Ibn Affan to negotiate with the idolaters. When it was rumoured that Usman was murdered, Muhammad (P.B.U.H) took an oath from his followers to take revenge³⁶.

After this incident, the Quraysh expected unpleasant consequences and sent a delegation under the leadership of Suhail Ibn Amr to negotiate with the Muslims. The negotiations resulted in signing an agreement between the Muslims and the Meccans.

Some main points of the agreement are presented below.

1. The Muslims will return to Medina without performing the Umera;
2. Next year they can make the Pilgrimage, but their stay in Mecca will not last longer than three days;
3. The Muslims will not take with them those Muslims who already live in Mecca and will not forbid others to leave Islam and rejoin the Meccans;
4. The tribes of Arabs will be free to join any alliance;
5. For a period of ten years there would be peace between the Muslims and the Quraysh.

This agreement, known as the Treaty of Hudaibiyya, was a marvellous example of conflict resolution by the

Prophet of Islam Muhammad (P.B.U.H). using a strategy of dialogue and negotiations.

In this treaty a true pacifist approach to conflict resolution was applied as well as a strategy of dialogue was used in its true spirit in order to resolve the issue. At every stage of negotiations the policy of compromise on the part of the Prophet of Islam was adopted, for example when a representative of the Quraysh Suhail objected that the text of the Meccan agreement should start with the words ‘In Thy name O Allah’ instead of “In the name of Allah, the Most Merciful, the Most Beneficent”.

Another objection when raised by the Meccan side against the wording of “Muhammad, the Messenger of God”. Even When Ali showed some reluctance and tried to put forward some arguments against removing the words, the Prophet took the pen from Ali and himself deleted the words because he was determined to avail himself of a chance for peace at any cost. A very important principle for conflict management according to the Prophet had been laid down, namely that a war should not be a desirable option and that all disputes should be resolved through peaceful means and one should make utmost efforts to make use of a chance for peace.

The Conquest of Mecca

Two year after the signing of the Treaty of Hudaibiyya, the agreement was annulled because of an incident. Banu Bakr and the Quraysh killed a man from Banu Khuza who was an ally of Muslims under the agreement³⁷.

The attack on the allied tribe was regarded as an attack on the signatory. Thus, after the above mentioned event, the Prophet of Islam Muhammad (P.B.U.H) presented three options to the Quraysh:

- Declaring a breach of coalition with Banu Bakr;

- Paying compensation for the murder;
- Breaking the Treaty of Hudaibiyya.

They adopted the third option and made it possible for Muslims to attack Mecca. When annulment of the Treaty was declared, Muhammad (P.B.U.H) ordered his companions to prepare an attack on the city and left for Mecca with 10,000 of his followers. The journey was kept secret, thus the Quraysh became aware of it only when Muslims were just a few miles away from Mecca. The reason for secrecy was that Muhammad (P.B.U.H) did not want to give them any time to prepare for war.

Because of this diplomatic strategy the Prophet of Islam Muhammad (P.B.U.H) conquered Mecca without any violent clashes or bloodshed. Even on that occasion the Prophet of Islam Muhammad (P.B.U.H) displayed his commitment towards peace. Instead of taking revenge on the Meccans, he declared a general amnesty for all of them by saying “Go, You are all free”³⁸.

He further said that those who would keep the doors of their houses closed or would enter the boundaries of the holy place Kabah or the house of Abu Sufyan would be safe. The incident of the Conquest of Mecca is thus a beautiful example of resolving a conflicts by peaceful methods.

Conclusion

With a long history of violent clashes and conflicts, even after entering the 21st century, the man is still looking for modern methods of conflict management. In the global world with the emergence of new threats to world peace, such as terrorism, nuclear war or the appearance of non state actors (terrorist organizations), a conflict remains the biggest threat to world peace. The conflict resolution methodology adopted by Muhammad, the Proph-

et of Islam can help modern world to maintain peace and avoid bloody conflicts. Modern methods of peaceful settlement of disputes seem to be based on the philosophy of Muhammad (P.B.U.H), which can be proved by the above mentioned examples.

In the past when people lived in ignorance, the Prophet of Islam Muhammad (P.B.U.H) promoted the culture of dialogue and negotiations. His strategy can thus play a significant role in conflict management and peace building making this planet a safer place for mankind.

NOTES

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